Trinity
C!N
2008 FCBD Special

CSN's Top 10 Comics for FCBD

1. ***All-Star Superman*** - *Grant Morrison & Frank Quitely* have taken every aspect of the Superman mythos that's now a part of our pop-culture "collective consciousness" and blended it into an energetic, unpredictable, and thoroughly captivating series. The supporting cast, the Fortress of Solitude, the unpredictability, the occasional silliness, and the timeless charm are here, making this the one must-read ***Superman*** title equally accessible to all readers.

2. ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** - ***Buffy*** creator *Joss Whedon* was never given the opportunity to develop his plans for Season Eight on television, since the series was cancelled after seven seasons—but now fans of the Slayer can find out what Whedon had planned via this comic book series. Whedon is and his hand-picked team of writers are doing things here that they could never do on a television series budget—including a build-up to a major story arc featuring the future slayer Fray.

3. ***Secret Invasion*** - For years, Marvel's superheroes have won confrontation after confrontation with the shape-shifting alien race known as the Skrulls. Now it's time for some Skrull payback in this suspenseful summer-blockbuster-film-in-comic-book-form by *Brian Bendis & Leinil Yu*. The Skrulls have managed to infiltrate virtually every superhero team in the Marvel Universe, and the heroes are sure who they can trust—but they'd better figure it out fast!

4. ***Final Crisis*** - DC unveils their grandest, most far-reaching miniseries this month, courtesy of star writer *Grant Morrison* and artist *J.G. Jones*. This series begins at the dawn of DC history with Anthro, the first boy, and ends with the post-apocalyptic Kamandi, the last boy—but it's what in between that will make this a fascinating read. To prepare readers for this series and other big events, DC is producing a special ***DC Universe Zero*** comic book that should be on the shelves right now—it's a great way for new readers to prepare for the impending ***Crisis***.

5. ***The Walking Dead*** - *Robert Kirkman* takes an overused horror concept—the isolated island of humanity in a zombified world—and breathes new life into it. The horrifying nature of the undead zombies is made even more real by the believable human element that Kirkman brings to his beleaguered living cast in this mature-readers sophisticated horror tale.

6. ***Trinity*** (starts in June) - Many comics seem to be a part of a larger comic book jigsaw puzzle, unable to present a complete picture by themselves—but this weekly series by star writer *Kurt Busiek* and comics artist extraordinaire *Mark Bagley* is a self-contained series that explores the vital role played by Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman in the DC superhero universe. Busiek & Bagley are playing with pretty much every major DC character in this sprawling saga, but the superheroic Big Three remain at the center of each and every issue—and that's great news for anyone who's ever enjoyed the adventures of these iconic heroes.

Comics: Something for Everyone!

If you mention comic books, most readers think Superman or Spider-Man or Batman or Iron Man or Wonder Woman—but those superhero mainstays are facets of a continually-expanding entertainment medium that truly offers something for everyone!

Western, romance, historical adventure, drama, humor, science-fiction, horror, fantasy, war, mystery—these genres, and many others, comprise the world of contemporary comic books. Anyone who thinks that the medium is only targeted at adolescent males is *way* out of touch with the vitality and variety that can be found in today's comic shop.

Free Comic Book Day offers an opportunity for you to sample some of that variety and find just the right comic book for your tastes—and no matter what those tastes are, there's just the right comic book for you.

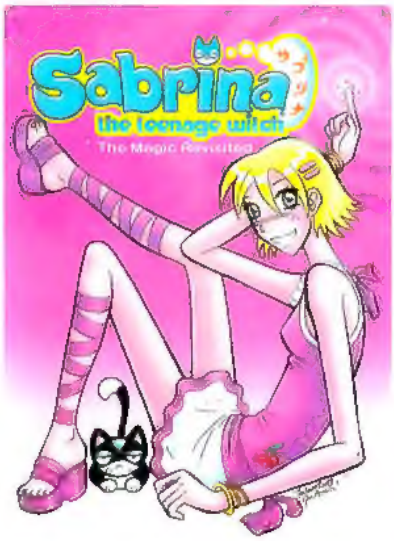
The staff of your friendly local comic shop can help you find the books you'll enjoy; talk to them, let them know what you enjoy reading or watching, and odds are they can point you to a selection of comics targeted to your interests.

This special issue of ***Comic Shop News*** is also designed to help you discover some of the best comics material on the shelves today, both in periodical form as well as in special editions. Check out our lists, then check out some of the books and discover all the remarkable entertainment that you've been missing!

7. ***Fables*** - What happens to the fairy tale characters after the fairy tales are over? That's the question *Bill Willingham, Mark Buckingham, & Steve Leialoha* answer in this provocative and edgy fantasy drama targeted towards more sophisticated readers. These aren't tales for children—but then again, there were some pretty kid-unfriendly elements to those original fairy tales, too! It's fascinating to see the life that these fantasy mainstays have made for themselves in our modern world, and it's intriguing to see that they *didn't* necessarily live happily ever after...

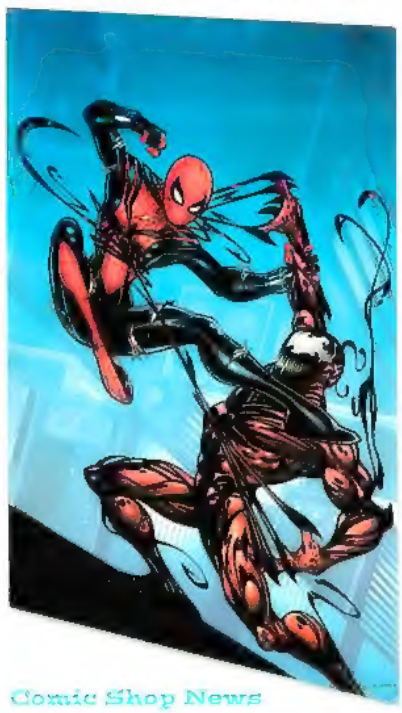
Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

younger readers. This is low-violence, problem-solving sort of storytelling with an enduring charm. (A second DC series, ***Super Friends***, presents the same sort of values-positive storytelling using Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and other DC heroes as the primary characters.)



5. ***Sabrina*** - While the core Archie books remain comfortably familiar year after year, Archie decided to take a bolder approach with ***Sabrina***: they brought in a new talent, *Tanya del Rio*, to reinterpret the comic in a contemporary manga style. The new ***Sabrina*** plays up real-world characterization, mixing it with the magical elements that readers expect from a comic that stars a teenage witch.

6. ***Spider-Girl*** - When Marvel wanted to create a near-future version of the familiar Marvel Universe, they went to former editor-in-chief *Tom DeFalco*, whose unbridled enthusiasm for accessible, wholesome superhero comics is second only to *Stan Lee's*. Set about sixteen years in the future, ***Spider-Girl*** stars the teenage daughter of Peter Parker and Mary Jane; she's inherited her father's spider-abilities, and carries on his heroic tradition for a new generation. Look for lots of next-generation characters to make appearances in here. (Four digest collections of early issues are available.)



7. ***Owly*** - This remarkable wordless comic by *Andy Runton* is perfect for younger readers as well as for those all-ages readers who have fond memories of such wordless comic strips as ***Henry***. The charm is in the visuals-only approach, which relies on skillful visual storytelling and charming characters to create memorable stories that hold up for multiple "readings."

8. ***Hardy Boys*** - NBM revamps the classic detective-brothers series for the 21st century in these fast-paced, instantly appealing mystery tales done in a light manga style. The classic Hardy Boys elements are here, but the modern look is much better than nostalgia for attracting new readers. (One digest out so far, with new volumes appearing quarterly; NBM also offers a companion series, ***Nancy Drew***, that's just as cleverly done—and it has the same light-manga visual style that young readers find so inviting.)

9. ***Scooby-Doo*** - Ruh-Ro... Thought we were going to forget the doggie detective and his gang, didn't you? Forty years of cartoons and a couple of big-budget films make Scooby, Shaggy, and the gang instantly recognizable to grandparents, parents, and kids—and the comic book stories are frequently more engaging than the original cartoons! (Two digests reprinting early ***Scooby*** stories are also available.)

10. ***Little Lulu***- It's no wonder that Lulu has become a female icon—she's independent, resourceful, bold, adventurous, and not above helping her bumbling friend Tubby when he gets in over his head. These stories by *John Stanley & Irving Tripp*, which present Lulu at her best, will make you wish that they still made comics like this.

Top Ten Superhero GNs

1. ***Watchmen*** - What begins as a murder mystery becomes something much more, thanks to the genius of creators *Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons*. Like Kurosawa's ***Rashomon***, ***Watchmen*** uses the mystery as a means to explore human—or in this case, superhuman—nature. This graphic novel, with its exploration of the dichotomy of superbeings who both uphold the law and transcend it, is essential reading for anyone interested in the concept of superheroes.

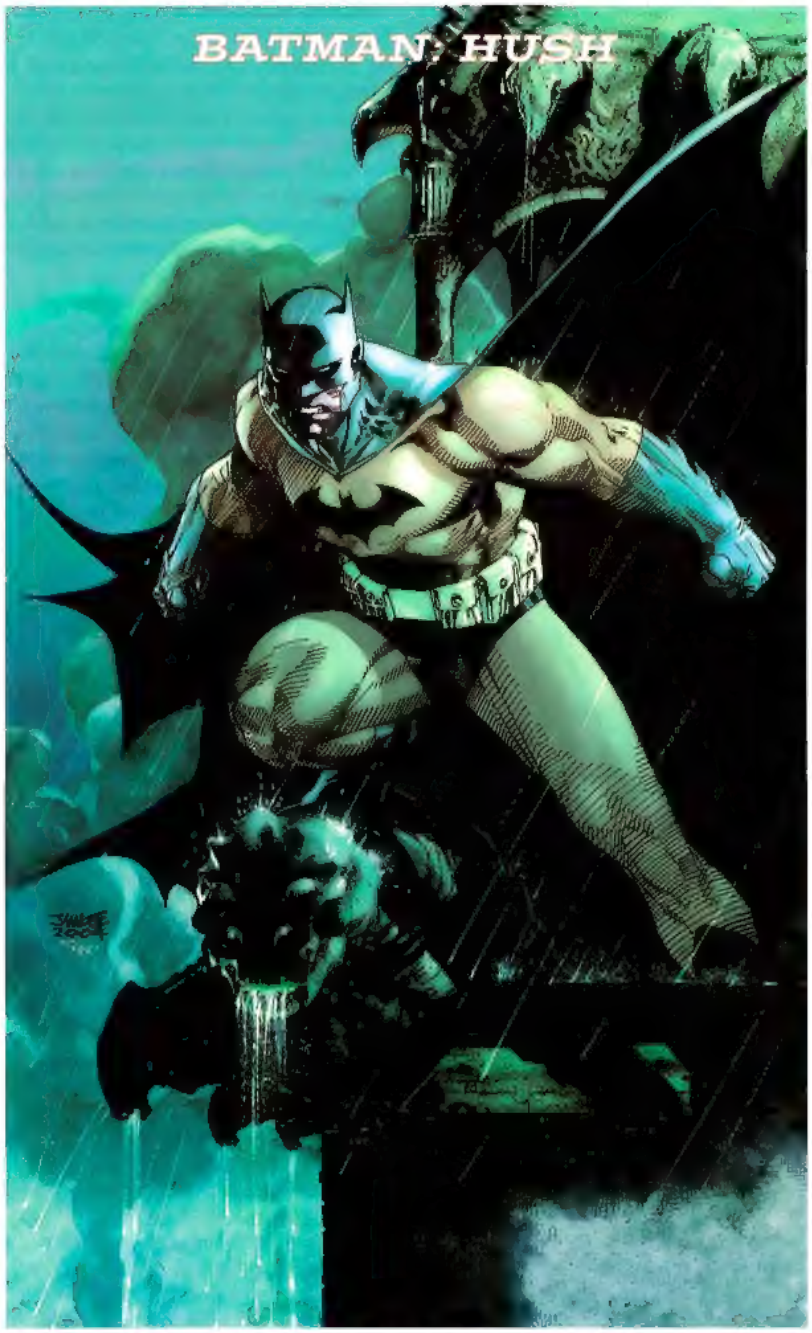
2. ***The Dark Knight Returns*** - *Frank Miller* redefines Batman with this graphic novel focusing an older Dark Knight who returns to action when his world needs him most. But is there room in this all-too-gray world for Batman's black-and-white morality? The climactic final battle between Batman and Superman is worth the admission price by itself. Readers will see early hints of the ultraviolent ***Sin City*** in this sprawling, brawling graphic novel.

3. ***DC: The New Frontier*** - Writer/artist *Darwyn Cooke* explores the beginnings of DC's modern superhero era in this sprawling, grand adventure that brings together many of DC's core heroes, along with a large supporting cast of lesser heroic luminaries. This two-volume graphic novel series (also available as a deluxe Absolute edition with lots of "director's cut" extras) was the inspiration for this year's animated feature ***Justice League: The New Frontier.***

4. ***Kingdom Come*** - The contrasting values of the classic superheroes and the next generation of superbeings is at the center of this graphic novel that manages to be both grandly mythic and intensely personal at t he same time. *Mark Waid & Alex Ross* define the essence of superheroism in this fully painted saga that offers a look at today's heroes in the sunset of their lives, often haunted by the events of prior years. Whaddaya know—with great power *does* come great responsibility!...

5. ***Marvels*** - This is the project that put *Alex Ross* on the map artistically. Written by *Kurt Busiek*, ***Marvels*** offers a human's-eye view of the birth of the age of Marvel superheroes. The human in question is Phil Sheldon, a news photographer for the ***Daily Bugle;*** he becomes our eyes into a normal world reshaped forever by a veritable explosion of superbeings. Superhero comics traditionally make the superhuman seem normal and everyday: ***Marvels*** restores the sense of wonder that is all too frequently missing from superhero drama.

6. ***Batman: Hush*** (2 vols) - The quintessential Batman adventure, courtesy of *Jeph Loeb & Jim Lee*. This back-to-the-basics tale pits Batman and the rest of



his extended Bat-family against virtually every major villain from Batman's Rogues' Gallery. The catalyst for the conflict is the mystery villain Hush, who seems to know all of Batman's secrets... and is willing to use his knowledge to defeat the Dark Knight.

7. ***X-Men: Days of Future Past*** - Set in a dystopian future controlled by the sentinels, this superhuman-mutants-versus-technology-gone-wild tale by *Chris Claremont & John Byrne* is a precursor to the Wachowski Brothers' ***Matrix*** films, minus the religious trappings. (You might have noticed that, like many other books on this list, this is an alternate-reality storyline. There's a reason for that: the alternate-reality allows creators to break free of the limitations of current continuity to explore broader themes in a more imaginative setting.)

8. ***Identity Crisis*** *Brad Meltzer* brings his skills as an author of best-selling suspense/thrillers to play in this compelling murder mystery that shakes up the entire DC Universe. Without this compelling storyline, there might well be no current ***Infinite Crisis*** series.

9. ***Civil War*** - *Mark Millar & Steve McNiven* tell the story of a superhero universe torn asunder by the Superhero Registration Act. When the irresponsible actions of a group of heroes results in hundreds of civilian deaths, the government and the people push for superheroes to be registered and regulated just like doctors or pilots or others. Some favor the idea, others vehemently oppose it, and a Civil War result. Major changes to many of Marvel's highest-profile heroes ensue, leading to a dramatic resetting of the Marvel Universe that echoes some of the philosophical disputes in our own society.

10. ***Invincible Volume One*** - *Robert Kirkman & Cory Walker* introduce the teenaged son of one of the world's most famous superheroes. Mark Grayson's normal teenage life is about to be shaken up a bit, though, because he's starting to develop some of his father's superpowers... and while that seems good, there are some rather unique problems that go along with the whole superhero thing. Like ***The Incredibles,*** this graphic novel offers an insightful and entertaining look inside a superhero family.

Top Ten Non-Superhero Comics

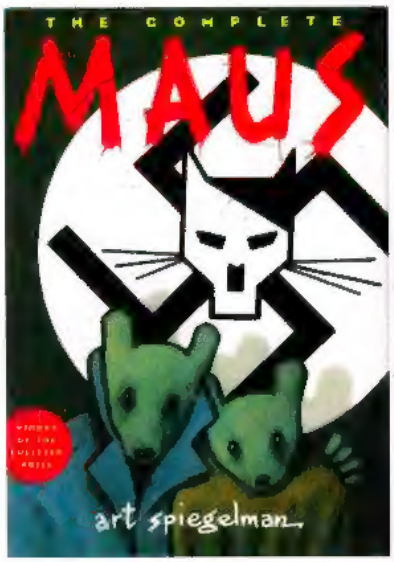
1. ***From Hell*** - *Alan Moore & Eddie Campbell* present one of the most provocative Jack the Ripper dramas ever created in *any* medium. Forget the lackluster film that stripped away all the life from Moore & Campbell's tale; the graphic novel is filled with conjectures, conspiracies, and complexities almost unparalleled in comics. And don't skip the endnotes—they're almost as fascinating as the graphic novel itself! (How often do you hear someone say *that* about a graphic novel?)

2. ***Blankets*** - *Craig Thompson* takes the phrase "graphic novel" very seriously, creating a massive novel-length, intensely personal tale of love (both romantic and brotherly) and faith. This coming of age drama is distinctive in both its size and its artistic accomplishment.

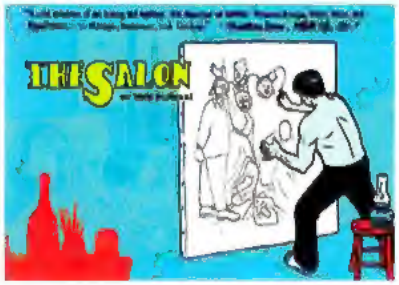
3. ***Sandman Vol 3: Dream Country*** - You can't go wrong with any collection of *Neil Gaiman's* superb ***Sandman,*** but this one stands out thanks to two remarkable stories: "Dream of a Thousand Cats," a tale both touching and disturbing in its vision of a cat's dreams; and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which reveals just where Shakespeare came up with those remarkable plays. (And after you read the latter, you might want to take a look at the final story from ***Sandman Volume 10,*** which offers a poignant glimpse at Shakespeare's final days.) Gaiman taps into the mythic with his tales of the Endless and their control of our lives... and our deaths.

4. ***League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*** - The ultimate literary adventure, this far-reaching melodrama by *Alan Moore & Kevin O'Neill* brings together the Invisible Man, Dr. Jekyll, Mina Harker, Captain Nemo, and Alan Quartermain, united as a sort of literary Justice League for a globe-spanning adventure positively packed with allusions to Victorian literature, popular fiction, and cultural icons. Read this one the first time for the story, then read it again to see how much you missed.

5. ***Maus—A Survivor's Tale*** - *Art Spiegleman's* Pulitzer-prize-winning anthropomorphic allegory is perhaps the most powerful tale of survival and suffering ever presented in comic book form. This graphic novel recasts the Holocaust as a grim struggle between



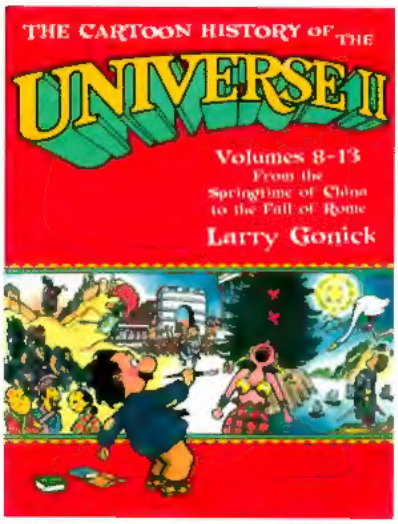
oppressed mice and controlling cats—but it's more than just a war story, as it's also the story of a son struggling to connect with a father who was a Holocaust survivor. It's an amazing work, complex and moving.



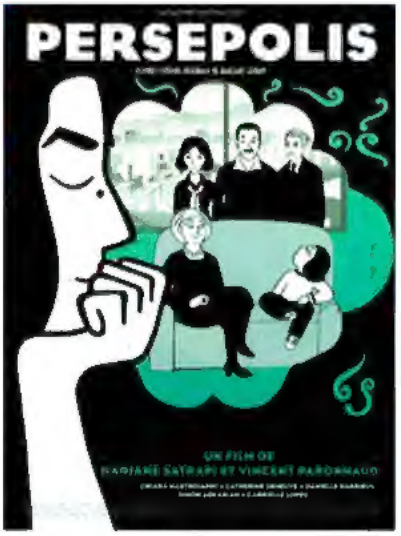
6. ***The Salon*** - Nick Bertozzi uses the turn-of-the-20th-Century Paris art community that includes Picasso, Braque, Matisse, and others as the setting for a crime drama. And the famous shapers of the arts aren't set dressing: the killer is stalking artists, and their art itself seems to have a link to the crime. Stylish and thought-provoking storytelling blends with insightful characterization in this quasi-reality crime drama.

7. ***Ministry of Space*** - *Warren Ellis & Chris Weston* deliver a remarkable look into an alternate reality in which England has become the dominant space power. Remarkably, Ellis manages to tell this panoramic tale while keeping an intensely personal focus on John Dashwood, the man whose drive to take England into space is central to the story. It's an inspirational saga, filled with hope and a Heinleinesque appreciation of human ambition and achievement.

8. ***Cartoon History of the Universe*** - *Larry Gonick's* wry, irreverent approach to history is absolutely addictive—and wholly educational! While he relies on silliness and sarcasm to entertain, he always remains true to history—and to support his take on events, he offers a full bibliography at the end of each volume. The layman with a casual knowledge of history is going to be captivated by this, but there's enough information here to intrigue even the most schooled historian.



9. ***Black Hole*** - *Charles Burns* nightmarish tale of teenages stricken with a mysterious sexualy transmitted plague that causes bizarre mutations is almost *Hieronymous Bosch*-like in his haunting tone and its disturbing subtext. Burns' graphic novel works as a powerful story of horrifying transformation and as an allegory on the transition from adolescence to adulthood—and it's equally disquieting on both levels.

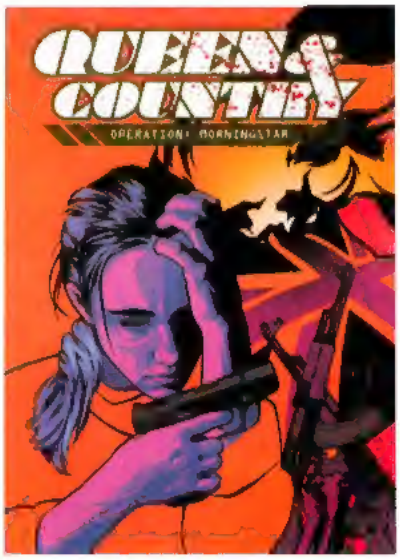


10. ***Persepolis*** - *Marjane Satrapi* presents a moving look at a young girl's life under the Islamic Revolution. Satrapi's autobiographical tale is a disturbing example that "the devil that you know may be better than the devil you don't." The book never ventures into stridence or mawkishness; instead, Satrapi's keen storytelling takes readers into a world that most of us have never envisioned.

The Name Seems Familiar...

If some of the names on the credits of comics seems familiar, there's a good reason: some best-selling authors, as well as the writers of highly successful television series, are also successful comic book writers. Here are a few of the writers whose comic work you might want to sample:

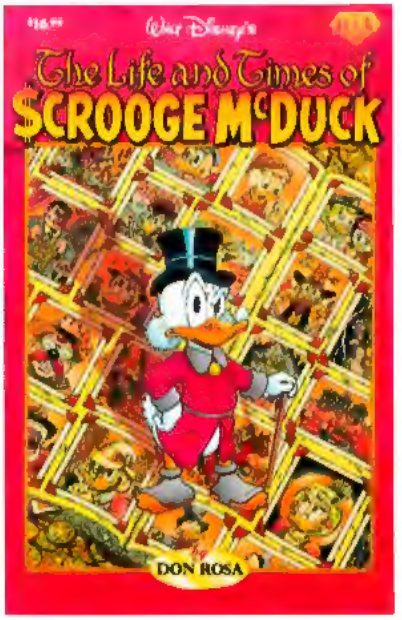
Jodi Picoult (***Change of Heart, The Tenth Circle, Nineteen Minutes***) - ***Wonder Woman***
Brad Meltzer (***The Book of Fate, The Zero Game***) - ***Justice League of America, Identity Crisis***
Denise Mina (***The Dead Hour, The Field of Blood***) - ***Hellblazer***
Stephen King (***The Shining, The Dead Zone, Duma Key, The Dark Tower series***) - ***The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*** and ***The Dark Tower: The Long Road Home***
Orson Scott Card (***Ender's Game, Seventh Son, Red Prophet***) - ***Tales of Alvin Maker: Red Prophet, Ultimate Iron Man, Orson Scott Card's Wyrms***
Laurell K. Hamilton (*Danse Macabre, Guilty Pleasures, Mistral's Kiss*) - ***Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter: Guilty Pleasures***
Neil Gaiman (***American Gods, Neverwhere***) - ***Sandman, The Eternals, Marvel 1602, Books of Magic, Death: The High Cost of Living***



Greg Rucka (***Keeper, Finder, Whiteout***) - ***Queen & Country, 52, Checkmate***
Clive Barker (***The Great & Secret Show, Books of Blood***) - ***Hellraiser, Clive Barker's Great & Secret Show***
Jim Butcher (***Dresden Files***) -***Jim Butcher's Dresden Files: Welcome to the Jungle***
Dean Koontz (***Darkest Evening of the Year, The Good Guy, Odd Hours***) - ***Dean Koontz's Frankenstein***

Television and Screenwriters
Joss Whedon (***Firefly/Serenity, Angel, Buffy the Vampire Slayer***) - ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Serenity: Better Days, Runaways, Astonishing X-Men***
Brian K. Vaughan (***Lost***) -***Y—The Last Man, Ex Machina, Logan, Runaways***

Marc Guggenheim (***Eli Stone, Lost***) - ***Young X-Men, Wolverine, Flash, Resurrection***
Kevin Smith (***Clerks, Chasing Amy***) - ***Green Arrow, Daredevil, Spider-Man/Black Cat: The Evil That Men Do, Bluntman & Chronic***
Richard Donner (***Superman***) - ***Superman: Last Son***
Javier Grillo-Marxuach (***Medium, Lost, The Dead Zone***) - ***Battlestar: Galactica—Cylon Apocalypse, The Middle Man, Annihilation***
Mark Verheiden (***Smallville, Battlestar: Galactica, Timecop***) - ***Superman/Batman***
Jeph Loeb (***Lost***) - ***Superman/Batman, Hulk, Ultimates 3***



Top Ten Classic Reprints

1. ***The Life & Times of Scrooge McDuck*** - *Don Rosa* reveals how Scrooge McDuck became the richest—and most miserly—duck in the Disneyverse in this far-reaching story that blends history and adventure in a most incredible way. *Carl Barks* blazed the trail with his amazing stories of Scrooge, Donald, and the three nephews, but it was Rosa who pulled threads from Barks' many tales and worked them into this grand fictional tapestry.

2. ***Complete Peanuts Volume Nine***- This volume, which collects strips from 1967 and 1968, presents *Charles Schulz* at the top of his game. Snoopy the WWI flying ace, the development of Peppermint Patty as a major Peanuts characters, and the introduction of ***Peanuts***' first black character, Franklin. Schultz alternates between poignant, acerbic, sarcastic, and observational in this collection of some of the most beloved strips in ***Peanuts*** history.

3. ***Marvel Masterworks: Amazing Spider-Man Volume Two***- From the very beginning, *Stan Lee & Steve Ditko* made Spider-Man a distinctively different

superhero—angst-driven, socially frustrated, guilt-ridden, and overwhelmed by responsibility, Peter Parker struggled to find balance in his life. This volume, though, is Lee & Ditko at their best; there isn't a bad story in the bunch, and many of the most important villains in Spidey history are present in these tales, including the unforgettable Sinister Six battle from ***Amazing Spider-Man Annual #1.***

4. ***Flash Archives Vol Three*** - Comic book history is made in this landmark collection that contains "Flash of Two Worlds," the first story to bridge the gap between the Golden Age and the Silver Age. All the twists and turns of comic book continuity are born in this remarkable tale. Every story is energetic, tight, and plot-driven, and *Carmine Infantino's* Flash conveys a visual elegance that no artist since then has been able to duplicate.

5. ***Spirit Volume Eleven*** - There are no bad volumes of this *Will Eisner* classic, but ***Volume Eleven*** is the first Eisner-produced volume after he returned home from WWII. In its pages, readers will see what happens when artistic genius, pent up for years, is allowed to run free. The strip blossoms from a clev-

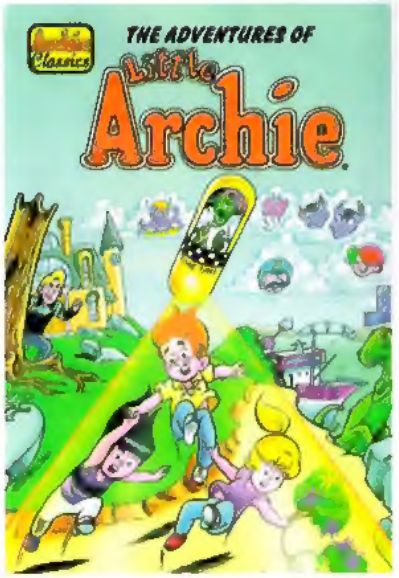
erly done, well-illustrated adventure strip to the sort of full-bore human interest storytelling that Eisner is famous for.

6. ***T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents Volume One*** - Energized by the success of Marvel's bold reinvention of the superhero field, *Wally Wood* and a band of top talents from both Marvel and DC (including ***Amazing Spider-Man's*** *Steve Ditko* and ***Justice League of America's*** *Mike Sekowsky)* create a new comic book world that blends the vitality of Marvel's books with the superspies-at-war angle of James Bond and ***The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*** And because it's all being built from the ground up right here, there's no backstory to confuse newcomers.

7. ***Marvel Masterworks: Fantastic Four Volume Five*** - This volume includes FF stories from the most inventive period in *Stan Lee & Jack Kirby* history. The Inhumans, Galactus, and the Silver Surfer all make their first appearances in these stories that convey the awe and grandeur of the world in which the Fantastic Four operate, while ***FF Annual #3's*** wedding of Reed & Sue reminds us that in spite of it all, these characters remain remarkably human.

8. ***Conan Chronicles Volume Four*** - From the very first issue of ***Conan***, it was evident that *Barry Windsor-Smith* was a talent to be reckoned with—but in this collection of Smith's final issues, his full artistic genius is in evidence. Who else would have attempted to bring the Pre-Raphaelite movement to adventure comics? And adventure fans won't find a storyteller more faithful to *Robert E. Howard's* vision of Conan than *Roy Thomas*, who offers both original stories and adaptations in this collection. Highlights include the first appearance of Red Sonja and the ultimate Conan tale, "Red Nails."

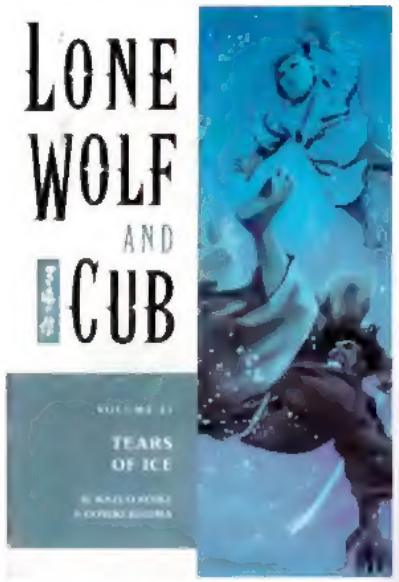
9. ***Showcase Presents Superman Volume One*** - In retrospect, it's amazing how many imaginative ideas got packed into these late 1950's-early 1960's Superman adventures. There are a few formula stories, but these 500+ black and white pages are packed to overflowing with the ideas and concepts that have become a part of Superman's canon today.



10. ***Adventures of Little Archie Volume One*** - *Bob Bolling's* tales of Archie when he was a boy are far from Archie's typical teen sitcom misadventures. These charming stories, which blend humor, drama, and adventure, convey the sense of wonder of childhood while fleshing out the personalities of Archie, Betty, Veronica, and the rest of the Riverdale gang.

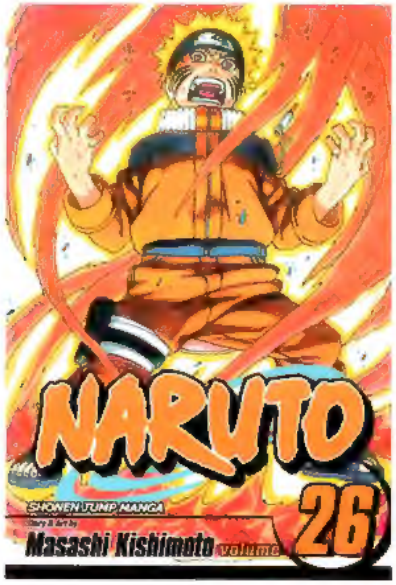
Top Ten Manga

1. ***Lone Wolf & Cub*** - *Kazuo Koike & Goseki Kojima* are the masterminds behind the greatest manga series of them all, a sprawling epic starring a vengeful ronin and his young son as he embarks on a quest for vengeance and a parental quest for a better life for his infant child. If it seems familiar, there could be good reason: ***The Road to Perdition*** was inspired by this historical saga.



2. ***Ranma 1/2*** - *Rumiko Takahashi's* comic farce focuses on a young man whose dunk in a cursed spring has major after-effects: any time he's splashed with cold water, he turns into a young girl, and he's stuck that way until a dash of hot water changes him back. ***Ranma 1/2*** is funny, fast-paced, sometimes absurd, but always entertaining.

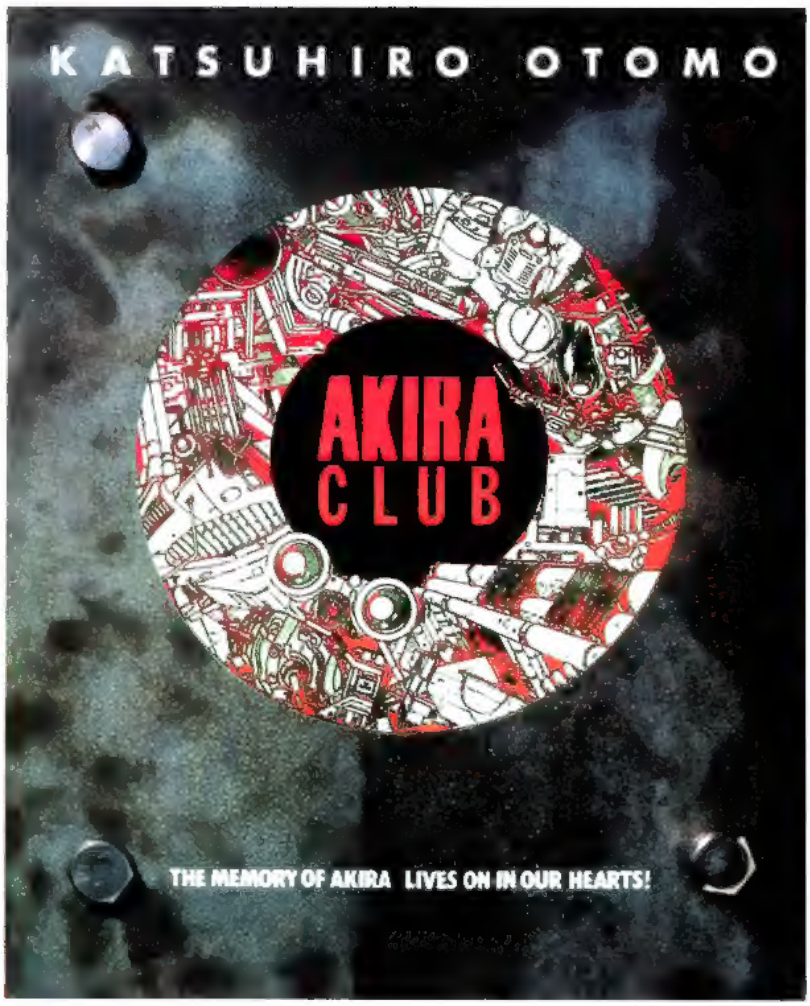
3. ***Akira*** - The best science-fiction manga ever, *Katsuhiro Otomo's* ***Akira***, set in a post-WWIII Neo-Tokyo, involves biker gangs, secret government psychic research programs, and a young boy who is transformed into the most powerful—and potentially deadly—being on earth. Otomo brings a dark, foreboding tone to the story that is almost unrelenting, propelling the saga forward to its horrifying conclusion. The publisher, Dark Horse, is rushing these books back into print in light of the announcement of an upcoming ***Akira*** live-action film.



4. ***Naruto*** - This brash comedy-drama tale of a young ninja's quest for accomplishment and approval has found an eager audience among American readers, no doubt helped by the anime's television success. The development and maturation of Naruto and his friends transforms them from stereotypes to appealing characters, making this an exciting story with a positive message.

5. ***Battle Royale*** - ***Survivor*** meets ***The Most Dangerous Game*** in this brutal, shocking, boundaries-pushing series of a group of students forced to battle one another to the death in the most extreme "last-man-standing" competition comics have ever seen. This harsh, no-holds-barred series is strictly for mature readers—and it pays off with mature content, complex psychological elements, and thought-provoking insights into human nature at its best... and worst.

6. ***Barefoot Gen*** - A truly unforgettable work, this is *Keiji Nakazawa's* first-hand tale of the Hiroshima bombing. This isn't a heavy political treatise or a sensationalistic shocker; instead, it's a first-hand retelling of one survivor's experiences before and after the bombing, capturing the indomitable human spirit on the comic book page in a way that virtually no other work ever has... or likely ever will...

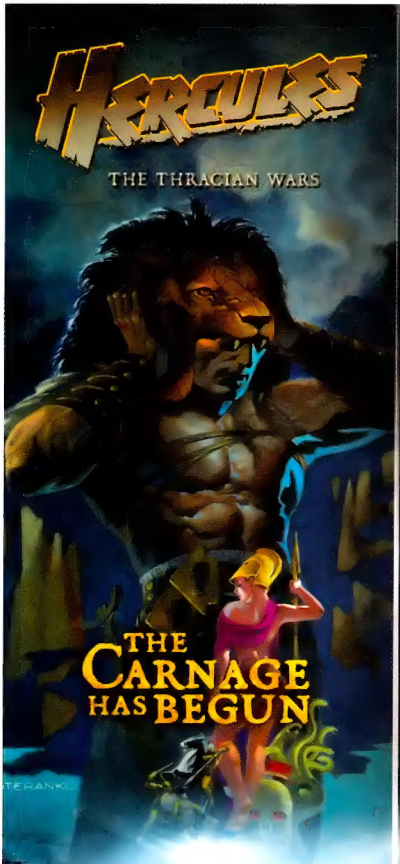


7. ***Maison Ikkoku*** - Who'd have thought that apartment life could inspire so many delightful tales? ***Maison Ikkoku*** is a comedy of characterization. This apartment-house-as-microcosm series by *Rumiko Takahashi* focuses on the residents of rundown apartment house Maison Ikkoku. The blossoming romance between failed college student Godai and the recently widowed apartment manager Kyoko is the focal point of this light romance.

8. ***Bleach*** - No, it's not the story of a hair colorist, in spite of the title. ***Bleach*** is the tale of a teenager who can see dead people, and a soul harvester who calls on the young Ichigo to help complete her mission. This is another manga that has benefited from a strong anime schedule, but the series' engaging characters and intriguing supernatural angle make it a natural for fantasy-adventure fans.

9. ***Ghost in the Shell*** - A complex cyberpunk tale by *Masamune Shirow*, this story is driven by its captivating visual style. The the haunting and suspenseful cat-and-mouse story focuses on a cybernetically enhanced agent on the trail of a data thief who seems to be just as keenly interested in the agent as she is in him. The multi-layered story is mature in theme and content, but it delivers in a way that all too few cyberpunk-themed comics ever do.

10. ***Berserk*** - *Kentaro Miura's* harsh, grim, brutal tale is set in medieval Japan, where a mercenary warrior named Guts struggles to find his place in a brutal world filled with hardship and betrayal. This unrelentingly violent tale is perfect for fans of *Akira Kurosawa's* films samurai film.



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